



Hi my name is Ashley Wright. I am a person in long-term recovery. I have been in recovery from many things but the most impactful in my life has been substance use and mental health challenges. I am also a survivor of childhood trauma and abuse. I am here to share a bit of my testimony with you and what peer support has done for me in my life in various ways and the immense amount of gratitude I have for it. Being orphaned by age 13 my struggles with substances began young. I coped with the loss and abuse I received from my parent with substances. I would be shipped around throughout different family members after this and experienced sexual abuse. I then coped with self-harm and even more substances. Not long after being removed and sent to foster care to become a ward of the state. I would become a mother for the first time right out of high school at age 18. By age 21 I was full blown into a life of alcoholism. I unfortunately was not present for much of my children's early years due to my struggles. I unfortunately did not receive much support after release from my first hospitalization. I fell through the cracks you could say. My life completely fell apart. I would lose custody of my children. Some support was offered which did get me through this dark time in my life I experienced my first beacon of hope of having a chance. Hearing of "peer support". My Rise worker introduced me to the concept and said it would be a good fit for me. I was hiding that I was in the peak of addiction at this time but that planted the seed. Sort of balancing best I could to deal with the mental health struggles, domestic abuse I was enduring and subsequent homelessness and treatment. This is where I was introduced to recovery. I worked the AA program and successfully graduated treatment. I did hit a speed bump upon exit and landed in my third treatment. This is where I met my first peer support to work with me, Chris. He worked with me and introduced me to making a Wellness Recovery Action Plan. It was my first real experience with control of my own life and mental health. I had felt a slave to my diagnosis and that I could not ever live a fulfilling and healthy life. I had the choice to really choose recovery for the first time for myself and on my own terms. I chose recovery. I had a second chance. I took all of what I had learned in my recovery programs and from my peer specialist to use. I got a job; I started hitting every meeting I possible could. I used my WRAP plan to seek out a care team of supports ranging from psychiatry to case management to ARMHS. This has been four years ago I started out on this new pathway. I spent about 2 years in foster care being built back up. I worked hard and stayed consistent. Staying on meds, making appts with providers, following through with work, volunteering with my church and making my recovery meetings. Before I knew it, I was offered a transitional housing apartment by Rise Inc. After a few months of success there they encouraged and supported me in going for full custody of my son back. Which was granted. I also began training to become a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist. I was passed and was certified with the state soon after the training. When we moved back to Cambridge in my Pastor's sober living program which I had been mentoring for, I was introduced to Wellness in the Woods. Since starting as a team member, I have branched out to 6 different roles. I started with our Imagine Network community events then was added to the Virtual Peer Support Network team. I was offered to help with Pine County Health and Human Services contract to provide both peer to peer

support as well as help at their drop-in center. Next, I was introduced to the option to take a Forensics Specialist training. I took this and got my endorsement with the Minnesota Certification Board. This led me into working under our Recovery Community Organization, Recovery in the Woods. I also began to provide virtual peer support to inmates at Crow Wing County Jail. This went so well and we came to find that my strongest vein in peer support is incarceration and reentry. I then went on to take the WRAP 2 training to become a facilitator. With my history and success for justice-involved individuals I was quickly chosen to be a facilitator for our WRAP trainings within the prisons for our contract with DOC. Peer support has meant so much to me in my life. How peer support specialists appeared throughout my journey not only planted the seed but led me along a pathway to what I know now to be my true calling in life. Now today I get to be that person for other people with this incredible organization that has changed and impacted my life. With the continuing opportunities for further educations and trainings I know I will continue to learn and achieve. Peer support has allowed me to take my early dreams and my life experiences to create a career for myself. Today I am the expert on not being the expert while at the same time only being the expert on me. My own story. Where I came from and who I am today. A recovered person with an immense hope for the future. My goal is to move forward without public benefits starting in April Thank you for your time in hearing my testimony.